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SUBJECT: TEACHER'S STRIKE PETERS OUT

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¶1. (U) Summary. The DRC's public school teachers' strike has ended after just two weeks, and students are slowly returning to school as of September 18. Teachers were on strike in several parts of the DRC to press for increased salaries and benefits, but realized it is unlikely the current lame duck GDRC has the capacity or will to meet teachers' demands. Thus, the unions have said they will wait for the installation of a new Parliament before making their demands again. End summary.

¶2. (U) September 17, the two major teachers' unions, SYECO and SYNECAT (Catholic school teachers), have called off the strike they announced in August 29, saying they will wait for the new government to be installed before pressing their demands. Primary, secondary and professional public school teachers in Kinshasa, Equateur, Bandundu, Eastern and Western Kasai, South Kivu and Bas Congo provinces went on strike September 4, the opening day of the 2006-2007 academic year, after SYECO and SYNECAT had announced the strike to protest the GDRC's failure to raise teachers' salaries and guarantee them pensions and other benefits.

¶3. (U) The teachers were demanding increases in part because of the GDRC's and Catholic Church's August 2005 call to end "motivation fees," although the GDRC did not as clearly make that call this academic year. (Note: Motivation fees are monthly payments that parents make to teachers to supplement salaries. End note.) In 2005, teachers went on strike for nearly five weeks, ending only after the strikes began causing civil disorder and the GDRC agreed to effectively double salaries through December 2005 (reftel). However, in January 2006, teachers' salaries returned to their original, pre-strike levels.

¶4. (U) This year's strike never gained much momentum; the unions apparently realized that the transitional government lacks the funds and the political will to meet the teachers' requests. Publicly, the unions demanded that the GDRC raise salaries to at least USD 208, the minimum civil servant salary agreed on between Vice President Z'ahidi Ngoma and all labor unions in 2004 in the so-called Mbudi Accord. (Note: The GDRC never ratified this agreement, and both the GDRC and the IMF have repeatedly said that the DRC budget would not support Mbudi's salary increases. End note.) Privately, however, the unions admitted even at the outset that they were willing to accept a smaller salary increase. Teachers in Kinshasa currently earn about USD 50 to USD 73 per month, while outside Kinshasa monthly salaries average USD 34 to USD 41.

¶5. (U) Given the probable failure of the strike, some teachers almost immediately ignored it, in part because many parents were willing to pay the motivation fees, despite the GDRC's call to end them. In Western and Eastern Kasai and South Kivu, teachers suspended the strike after just one week. The strike never even

began in some eastern and central Congo areas, including Gbadolite, Equateur province; Lubumbashi and Kalemie in Katanga province; Bukavu, South Kivu; Goma and Butembo, North Kivu; and Kindu, Maniema province. According to Congolese media sources, these teachers refused to strike because they believed that only Kinshasa teachers would receive any salary increases or other benefits as a result. In Kisangani, Orientale province, the governor pushed back the school opening date to September 18 in an effort to avoid a strike.

¶6. (U) Students are already slowly returning to public schools nationwide. In Kinshasa at least some schools are back in session as of September 18, while in Mbuji-Mayi, students have gone back to school but are waiting for their teachers to return. In Kananga, a school inspector told Econ LES that about one half of the public schools are in session.

¶7. (U) Comment. The quickly terminated strike is yet another example of the holding pattern in which the DRC finds itself until the installation of a new government. However, the line of groups and persons who are waiting to lodge requests for salary increases and governmental support is growing steadily longer. Many in this queue will be disappointed that in the short-term, the GDRC will not have any greater resources to meet these needs than it currently has.
End comment.
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